

Louisville & Nashville Railroad:
Union Station Trainshed
Water Street at Lee Street
Montgomery
Montgomery County
Alabama

HAER No. AL-1

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SI-MONG,
23A-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

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HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

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Location: The northwest side of Water Street, opposite Lee Street, in the City of Montgomery, Montgomery County, Alabama.

Date of Erection: 1897-98

Present Owner: City of Montgomery
North Perry Street
Montgomery
Alabama

Present Use: Multi-use public facility

Significance: The Union Station Trainshed in Montgomery, Alabama is a rare survival of a once common building type. It was the outgrowth of a desire by railroad companies to improve passenger comfort, which then became a matter of engineering pride.

Prior to the construction of Union Station, in 1897-8, Montgomery had been served by a small, two-story, frame structure constructed in 1860. Forty-four passenger trains were stopping in the city daily by 1894. The new station was planned to accommodate this growing load. While the volume of passengers was not as heavy as on major northern rail lines, it had become a point of public pride to upgrade station facilities. Most of the larger stations along the L&N mainlines, starting with the flagship station in Louisville, KY, were replaced with architecturally distinguished stations, including trainsheds, during the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

Although constructed in 1897-8, the structure of the Montgomery trainshed is of an earlier type. The gable roof form is more similar to sheds constructed in the 1870's. The competition between companies for national prestige led to vying for the longest span trainshed. New engineering techniques had resulted in arched balloon sheds in the 1890's, largely replacing gable construction.

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The main reason for the use of an older construction method at Montgomery is that the Montgomery shed crosses only four sets of track. A larger shed would have been useless for the volume of traffic at the station. Also, as at the Louisville trainshed, it is possible that some salvage parts from iron bridges were used in the Montgomery structure. This is undocumented, but the use of the Phoenix column and of metal eyebars as tension members is typical of iron bridge construction from 1868 to 1885.

The overall dimensions of the building measure 600 feet by 94 feet 6 inches. It is connected to the station by a sloping roofed portico. The trainshed roof is composed of twenty-five tricomposite Pratt trusses of timber, wrought iron and cast iron. The main span measures 77 feet 6 inches center to center on the columns. There is an overhang on the north side of 13 feet 8 inches and on the station side of 3 feet 6 inches.

The top chord of the truss is 9 x 12 timbers with a Phoenix column as the center beam (this is 8 5/8 inches in diameter and 20 feet long). The cambered bottom chord is made up of heavy eyebars with pin connections. The principle columns are built up of channels and iron plates riveted together. The only cast iron is in connecting shoes and couplings.

The original roof was of metal covered with slate. A central monitor, 20 feet wide, runs the length of the ridge. Originally this had a glass roof and open sides for ventilation.

The Union Station was designed by Benjamine Bosworth Smith, a Montgomery architect. The trainshed was produced out of the office of Robert Montfort, Chief Engineer of the Louisville & Nashville Railroad.

The Montgomery trainshed was built as this style of terminal design was already in decline. The corrosion of the steel and iron structural members by the enclosed locomotive gasses caused rapid deterioration of these large structures. Leakage was a problem, as was the danger of injury from falling glass. Shortly after the turn of the century, umbrella platforms between tracks had largely replaced trainsheds for passenger accomodation.

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Transmitted By:

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